

How to Present the Gospel, Acts 17:22-23 – October 19th, 2008

- We've been learning so much from the Apostle Paul who is on his second missionary journey here in the 17th chapter of Acts.
- We've seen how, and even why, he has taken such a different approach in Athens than he has in places like Thessalonica and Berea.
- This different approach has opened the door for him to now present the gospel to the Athenians in a meeting of the Aeropagus.
- As we just read, and will now see, the Apostle Paul is going to stand up and preach the Gospel in a unique way to this unique crowd.
- In so doing, he will actually be giving to us some very good ideas as to how we too can share the Lord when we present the Gospel.
- Some commentators suggest that Paul's message was compromised for an intellectual audience, as evidenced by the few conversions.
- I won't take the time today to go into why I'm not of that camp. Suffice it to say I don't think it's in our Bibles to show us what not do to.
- Were that the case, it would be as meaningless and leave us as helpless as a sign in town saying; "This is not the way to Kanoeho!"
- That being said, after petitioning the Lord about how to teach this passage, I believe it's a teaching on "How to Present the Gospel."
- The Apostle Paul is going to show us how to approach a unique audience in a most novel way, given their philosophical curiosity.

"Nothing could have pleased Paul better than to address so large and important an assembly as that which gathered on Mars Hill. With a considerable amount of courtesy the philosophers invited him to speak, curiosity to hear his novel teaching being their leading motive."

Charles Spurgeon

- Verses 22-23 are a teaching on "How to Present the Gospel." - Verses 24-31 are a teaching on "What to Present in the Gospel."
- Verses 32-34 are a teaching on "What to expect from the Gospel."

1. Be tactful (Verse 22)

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.
v22 Paul stands up and addresses the "Men of Athens," at the meeting of the Aeropagus by acknowledging that they are very religious.

- Paul is not complimenting them when he says; "I see that in every way you are very religious." One can appear religious and go to hell.
- Notice that for the first time, instead of starting in the scriptures, Paul begins with a general, and even generic, religious introduction.
- Perhaps the reason he did this was to use a "Spirit-led" tact of sorts, to avoid having them shut down, resulting in him being silenced.
- Also, I think it's worth noting that Paul is tactfully establishing a common ground from which to agree so he can then present Jesus.
- It's likely that Paul sort of had to do it this way because he knows that they don't know the Old Testament scriptures like the Jews.

2. Be observant (Verse 23a)

23a For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship,
v23a Paul then tells them that as he was walking around in Athens, he observed that, and looked carefully at, their objects of worship.

- This is a God given wisdom from above because Paul is showing to them that he cares enough for them to observe more about them.
- He shares with them that he's learned about them and that which is for them the objects of both their devotion and their worship as well.
- It behooves us, in our sharing the good news of eternal life in Jesus Christ, to first observe what or who is the object of their worship.
- The reason for this is because once you identify who or what their god is, you can better share Who the one true and living God is.
- It's akin to God showing Himself greater than the false Egyptian gods with the plagues which exposed them by being directed at them.
- One has suggested that the reason we have other gods in our life is because we think if there was only one God He would be distant.
- In other words, we tend to make for ourselves other gods because we think that they are tangibly closer to us and will be there for us.
- Again, like with the many Egyptian gods, they weren't there for them when the plagues struck, and neither will the Athenian's gods.
- It's a pretty good indicator that you are worshipping a false god when not only will it not take care of you, you have to take care of it.
- Two questions we should ask ourselves: Do I need my God, or does my god need me? Did I create my god, or did my God create me?

1 Samuel 5:1-5 1 After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. 3 When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. 4 But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. NIV

3. Be Bold (Verse 23b)

23b I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.
v23b Paul goes onto say that he found an altar with the inscription: "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Then he makes a rather bold declaration.

- He says to them; "what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you." This is what I call a "Holy Boldness."
- It stands to reason that this boldness would be necessary if Paul wants to minister his monotheistic message to a pantheistic crowd.

- Paul knew that this unknown god was created by the Athenian's in order to cover any god who they may have missed or neglected.
- Paul brilliantly, beautifully, and boldly states that he will make known this God, who to them, here-to-fore, has been unknown to them.

"Paul addressed them faithfully, beautifully and prudently. Few could have coped with these educated men as he did." Charles Spurgeon

"Paul knew this unknown God. ...No man in all the world was better equipped to make known to the Athenian intellectuals this unknown God than was Paul. The image to the unknown god had neatly bridged the gap for Paul and had given him the opening he needed.

John Phillips "Exploring Acts" v2 p350